

Towards a flexible definition of limits in urban planning: controlling urban form under uncertainty.

ISUF 21st International Seminar on Urban Form: our common future in Urban Morphology

Porto, FEUP, 3-6 July 2014

B. Moreira | PhD Candidate @ Architecture and Urbanism Study Center | CEAU - FAUP

bmoreira@arq.up.pt



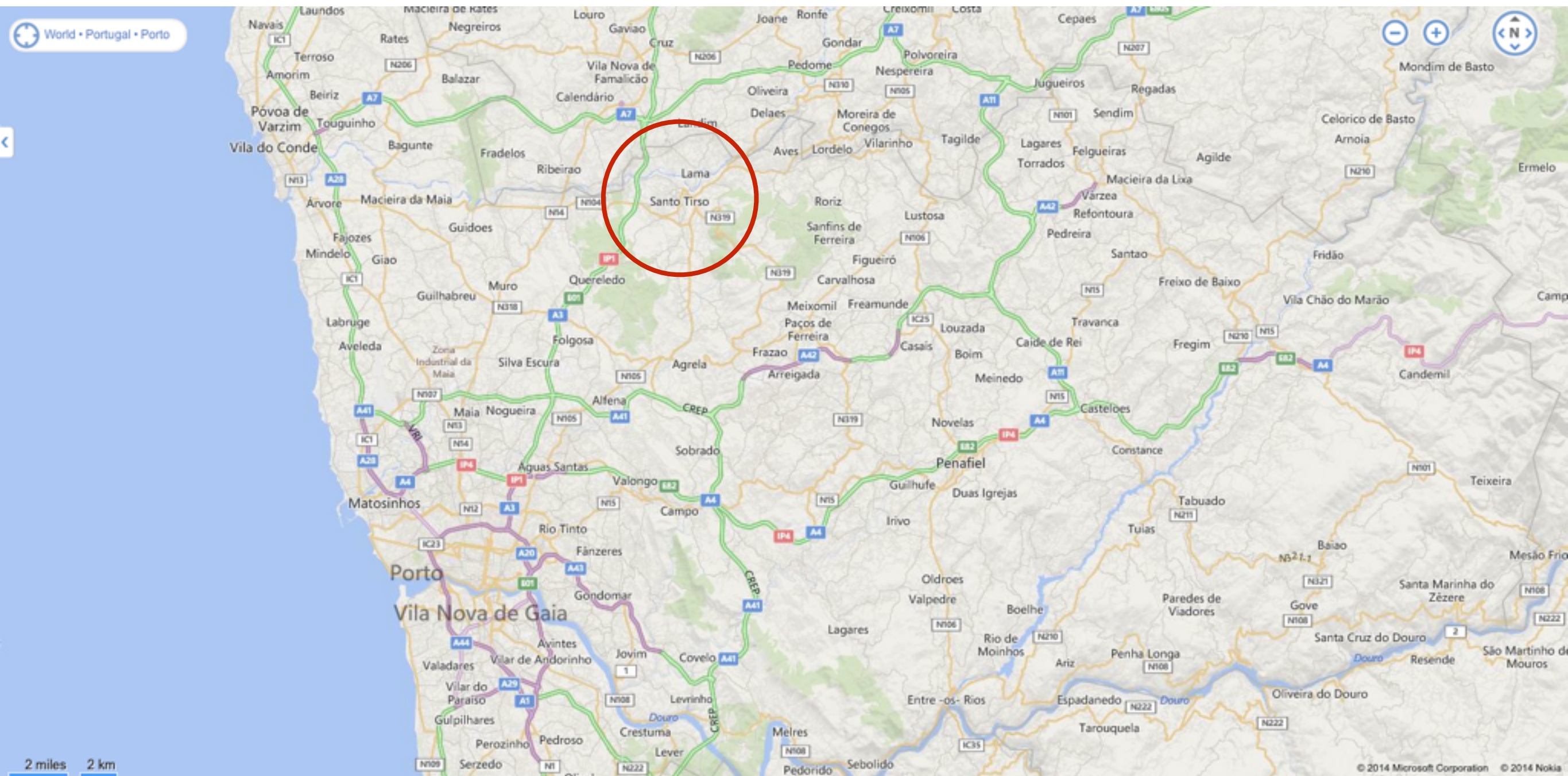
Summary

Reflection and theoretical framework on the concept of limit:

1. **Towards a limited rationality.**
2. **Unlimited citizens and territories.**
3. **The limit in controlling urban form.**

***Limited* rationality + *unlimited* citizens and territories > uncertainty in
controlling urban form**

Main Case Study



Municipality of Santo Tirso (Ave Valley region, Portugal) source: Bing Maps



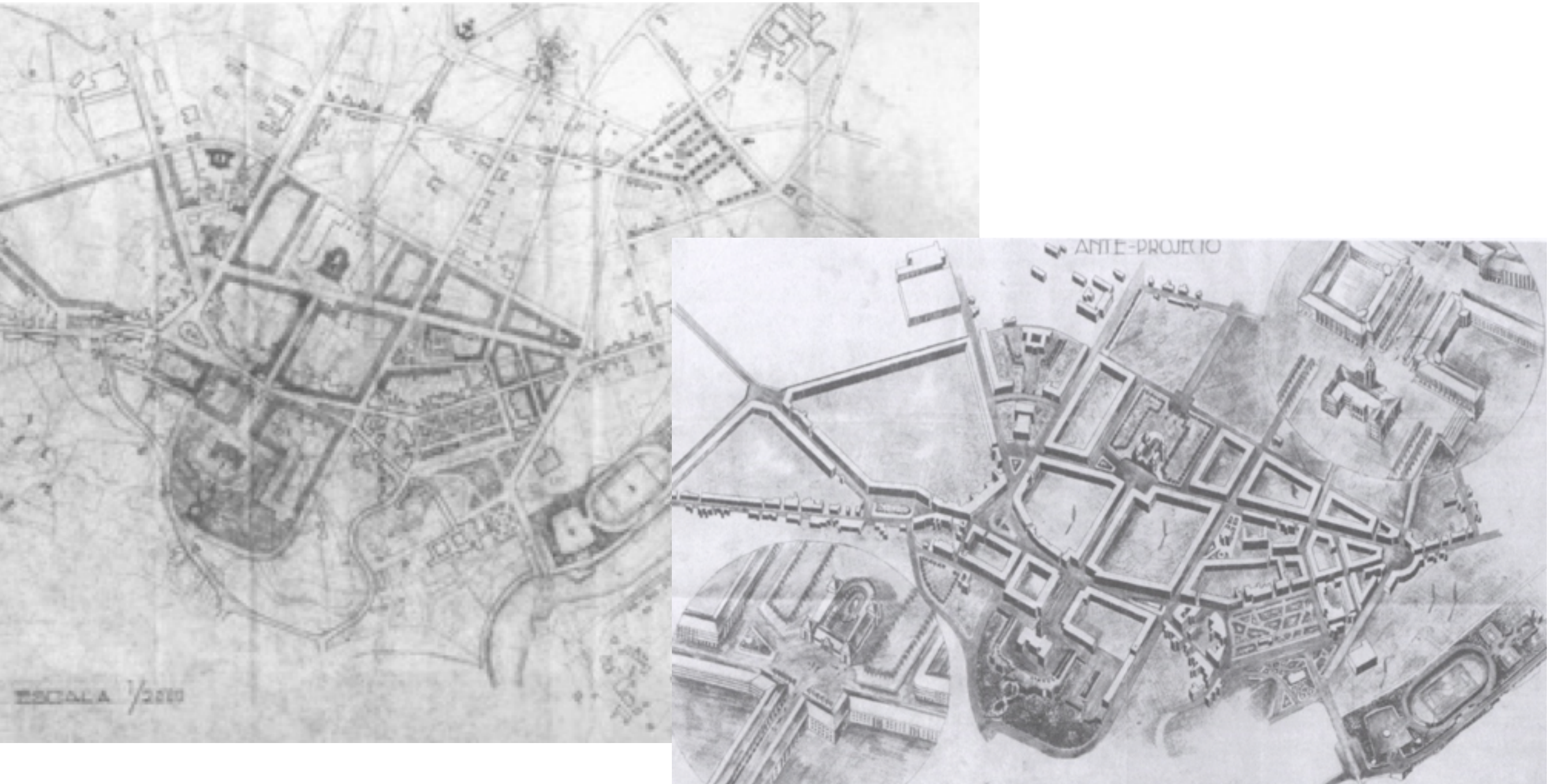
#1

**Towards a limited
rationality**

1. Towards a limited rationality: Positivism

- Positivism: natural science rationalism to be applied to social sciences, social facts as “*normal*” or “*abnormal*” - in need of a cure (Durkheim, 1982);
- *On planning: planner as “doctor” and owner of the truth - rational approaches led to designing the city by zoning, parameters, ratios, indexes* (Busquets, 1995).

1. Towards a limited rationality: Positivism



Preliminary design for the urbanization plan of Santo Tirso, 1943, by Rogério de Azevedo.

Source: Moreira, Á., Correia, F. C., Melo, C., & Gomes, M. (2013). Santo Tirso. Das origens do povoamento à atualidade. Santo Tirso:

Câmara Municipal de Santo Tirso.

1. Towards a limited rationality: Positivism

Preliminary urbanization plan of Santo Tirso, 1949, by Miguel Rezende (left) and existing situation (right)



Source: Moreira, Á., Correia, F. C., Melo, C., & Gomes, M. (2013). Santo Tirso. Das origens do povoamento à atualidade. Santo Tirso: Câmara Municipal de Santo Tirso.

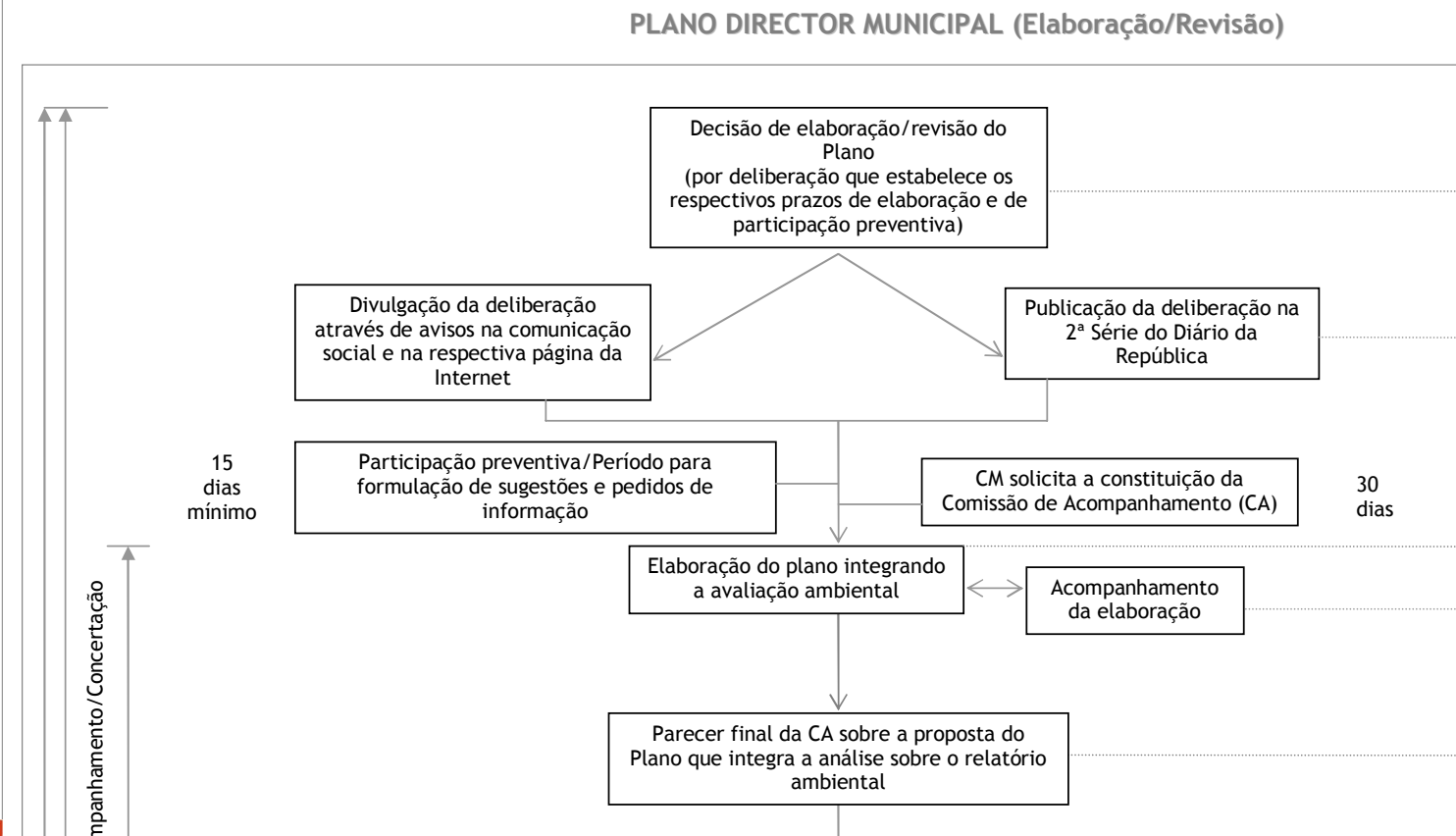
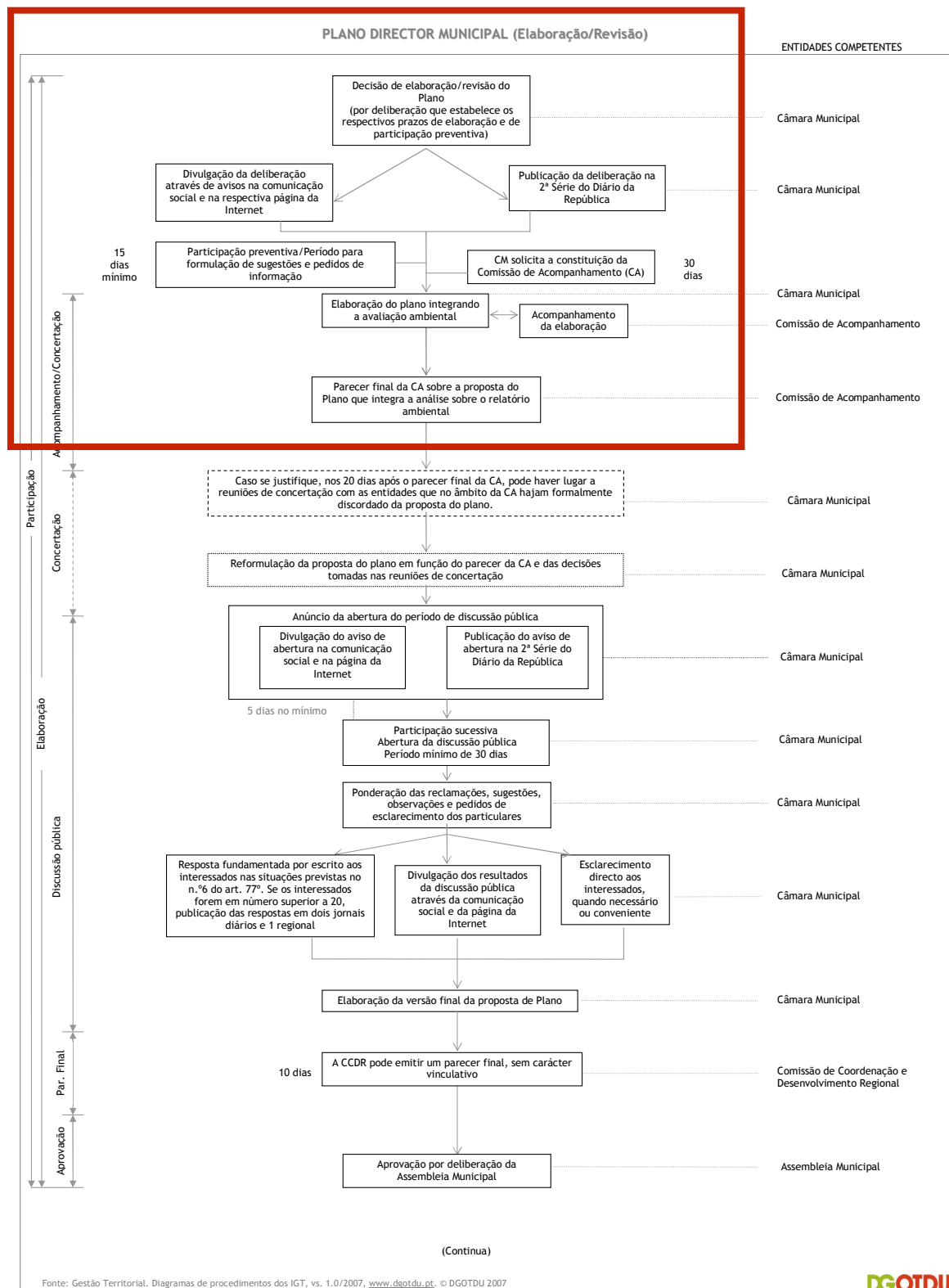
1. Towards a limited rationality: Taylorism

- Taylorism: systematic management to reduce every single workmen's action to a science;
- Individual judgment replaced by universal and systematic laws (Taylor, 1919);
- Subdivision of labour: separation between *planning* and *execution* and the importance of *planning ahead* by a class of *managers*;
- ***On planning: planner as a manager and anticipator of urban development tasks, promotor of universal and systematic laws.***

1. Towards a limited rationality: Fordism

- Fordism: innovation in work processes, capital accumulation and social regulation (Jessop, 1992);
- Mass production, standardized goods, division of labour on the assembly line - *economy of scale*;
- Continuous cycle of production, demand, profitability and re-investment;
- Social regulation: norms, institutions, networks and patterns of conduct of the capitalist society (Jessop, 1992);
- ***On planning: focus on the production of plans through institutional “assembly lines” for an homogeneous and standard society.***

1. Towards a limited rationality: Fordism

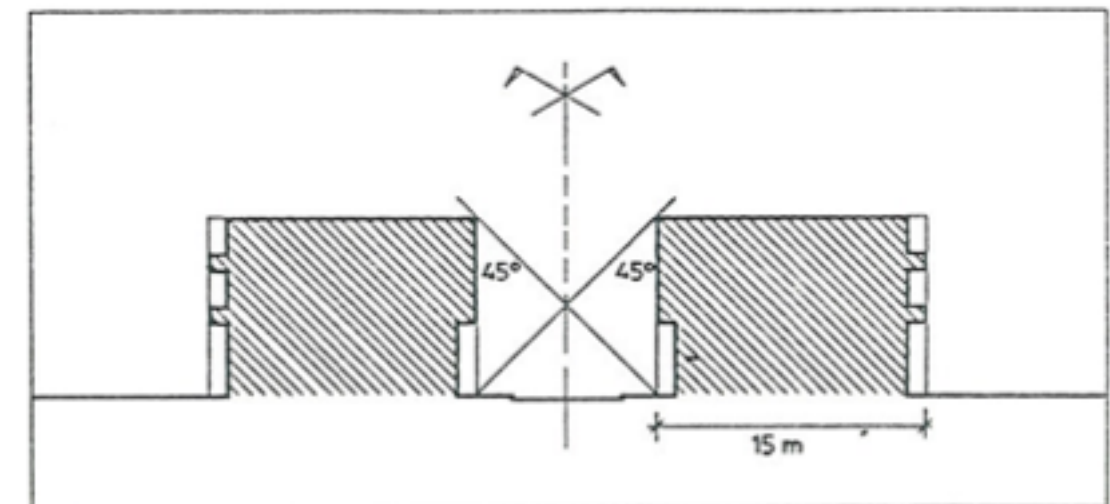
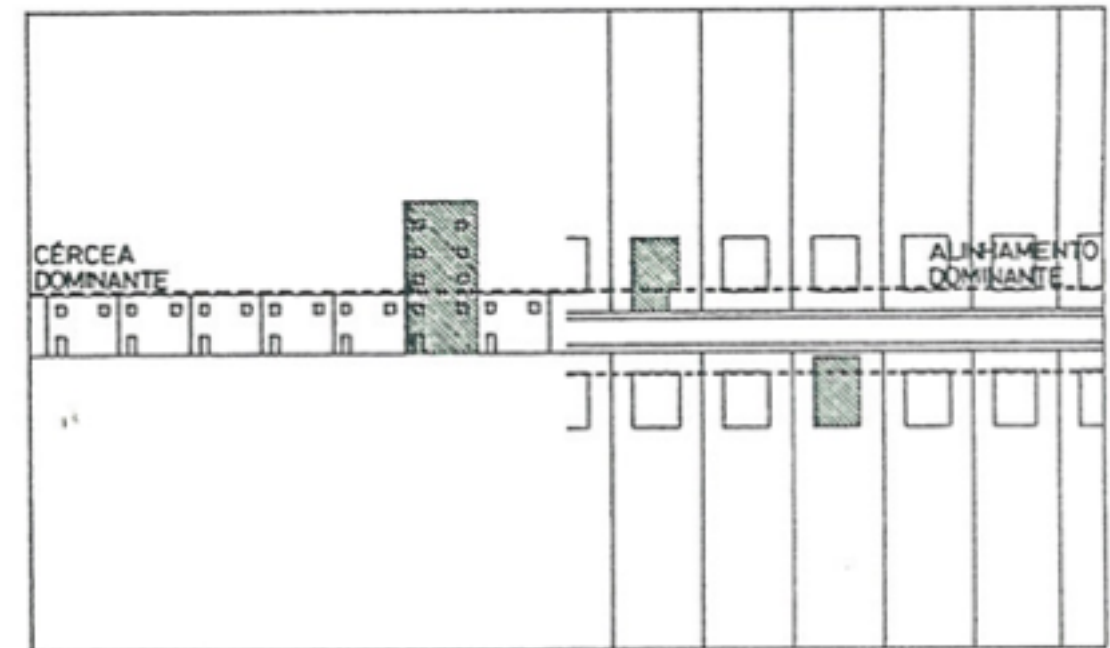


The production of plans: elaboration and revision of a Municipal Director Plan Source: DGOTDU

1. Towards a limited rationality

- Fordism failing as a virtuous growth cycle;
- Accumulation strategies being replaced by “just-in-time” approaches;
- Standard and homogeneous replaced by customization and diversity;
- Positivism can’t handle the growing complexity of our territories;
- **Discussion and learning by doing as important as scientific and technical knowledge;**
- **Planner as a mediator;**
- **Planning instruments less normative and more flexible “to grab opportunities” (Portas, 1995).**

1. Towards a limited rationality



Provisional Regulations in Santo Tirso during the elaboration of the Municipal Director Plan.



#2

**Unlimited citizens and
territories**

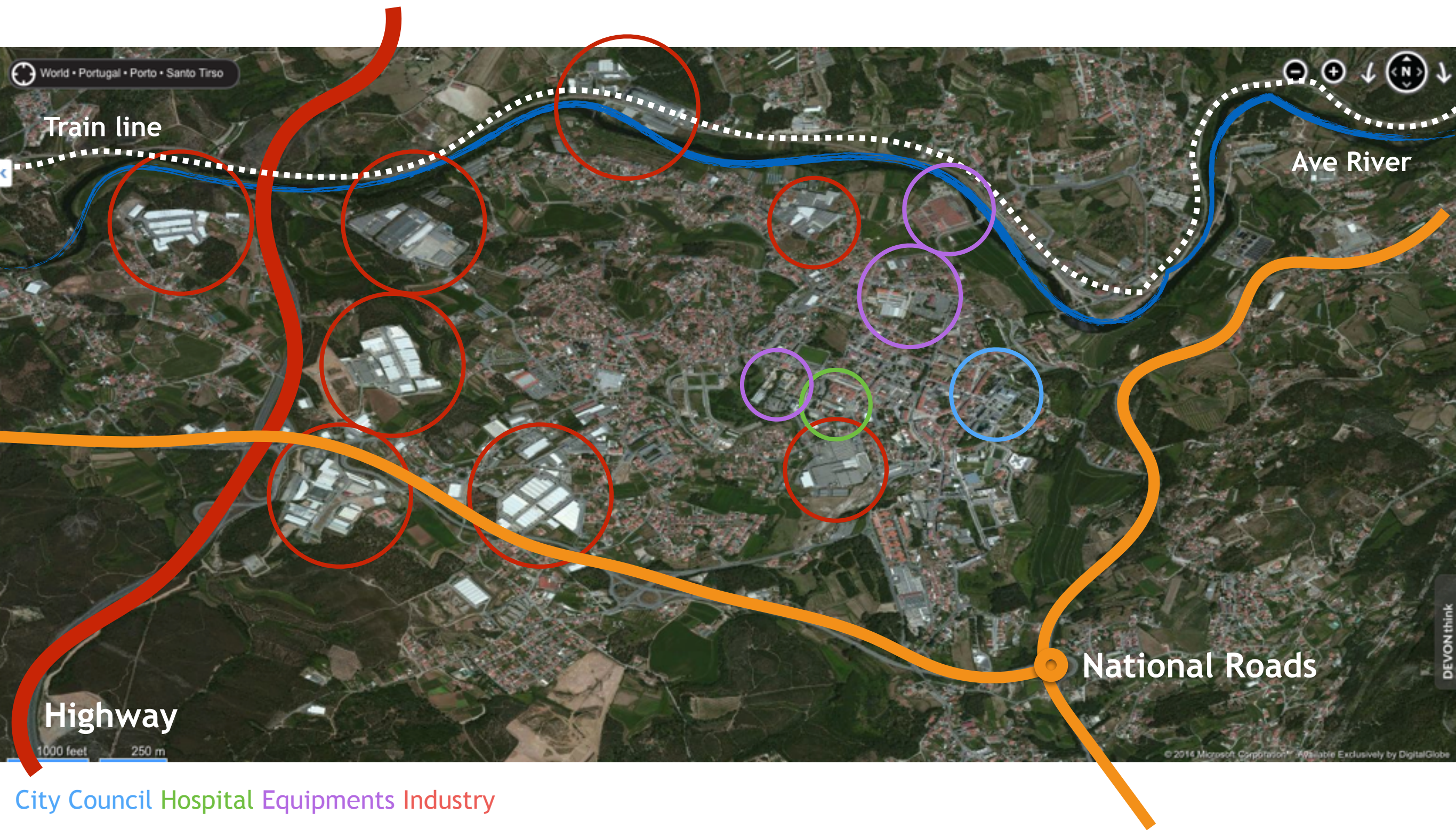
2. Unlimited citizens and territories

- Contemporary citizens: complexity and multitude of needs, aspirations and tools to achieve them;
- Faster and reliable ways of transport and communication - increased mobility, increased social fragmentation;
- Paradox: new ways of isolation - technological literacy, gated communities fed by “hiperspaced” mobility;
- **Complexity and difficulty of representing society as a whole and make compatible individual interests; what is “public interest”?**

2. Unlimited citizens and territories

- Increased mobility brings multiple territories of proximity; multiple belongings; multiple identities; multiple relationships;
- Complex and varied actions throughout the territory, new ways to explore, inhabit, produce it;
- **Dispersion, fragmentation and privatization as processes leading to the disappearance of public space as a space of citizenship (Borja, 2003).**

2. Unlimited citizens and territories



City Council Hospital Equipments Industry

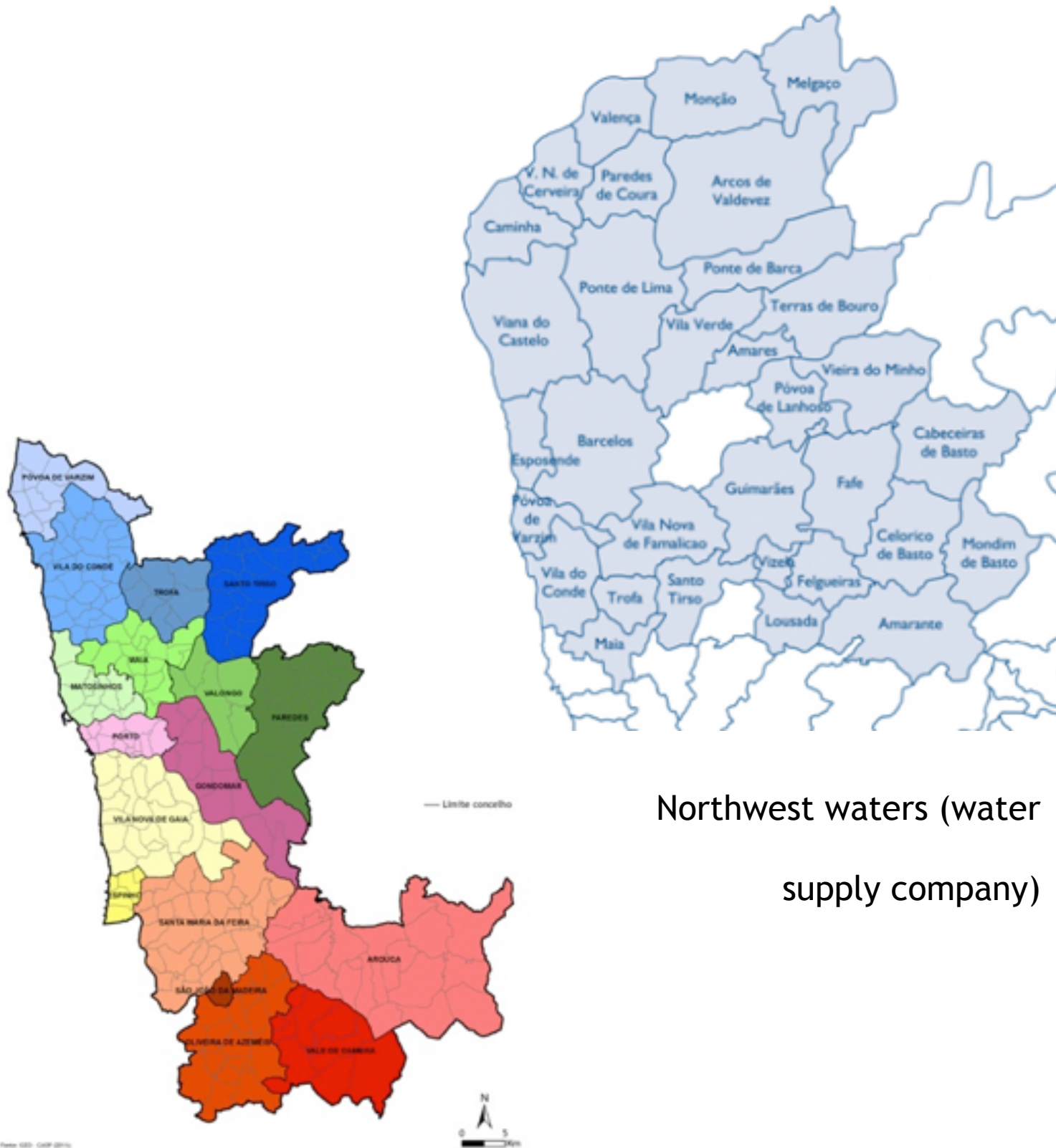
2. Unlimited citizens and territories



2. Unlimited citizens and territories

- Cities expand their limits; suburban growth; invasion of rural land; mix and clash of different realities;
- Limits of urbanity hard to trace: no longer exclusive to the [canonical] city (Domingues, 2013);
- **Multiple types of limits at a given time and space: physical, symbolical, administrative; what are the “real” limits of the territory?**
- **Administrative and political limits do not correspond to the complex dynamics of economy and society (Ferrão, 2014).**

2. Unlimited citizens and territories



Metropolitan area of Porto



Inter-municipal community of Ave



Ave Region (NUTS III)



#3

The limit in controlling
urban form

3. The limit in controlling urban form

- Changes in social and economic contexts lead to changes in urban planning policies;
- CIAM, 1933: urban planning as rationalizing instrument; large and simultaneous operations *networks, volumes and free spaces* (Portas, 2005);
- **Post-war: fordist machine, welfare state, distributive planning actions on the territory, strong public and central powers.**

3. The limit in controlling urban form

- Decay of the Fordist model, crisis, private sector gains power over public, multiplication of public entities;
- **Decay of the public monopoly on controlling urban form; preference for designing infra-structures instead of urban form;**
- Globalization of economy, reticular recomposition of the territory, flexibility over rigid and standard models;
- **Strategic planning aiming to make more operational the actions over the territory, seeking cooperation;**
- **Importance of contextual solutions and of *alternatives*** (Domingues & Silva 2004).

3. The limit in controlling urban form

- Increased localism, seek for participation, seeking representativeness of a fragmented society;
- Unpredictability of opportunities and execution capabilities, need for cooperative solutions instead of rationalized central ones;
- **Planning, management and systematic evaluation (Oliveira, 2011) of results needed for change of goals and objectives to be possible;**
- **Need for reflexivity: to reflect on every action to give a better response (Ascher 2010);**
- **Need to incorporate this flexibility in formal and informal planning instruments.**



Conclusion

Conclusion

- Limitation of the rational-comprehensive approach: planning with an unlimited conception of science and knowledge; difficulty to accommodate all urban forms and dynamics on strict rational models;
- Less limited citizens and territories: complexity, diversity, multiplicity with consequences on the territory;
- **Failure of several paradigms due to increasing uncertainty and need for a limited rationality on contemporary urban planning;**
- **Flexible definition and understanding of this limited rationality as a way to control urban form under uncertainty.**

Thank you

This paper is part of the PhD research project “From informality to formal variability - planning and urban management strategies under uncertainty contexts: the municipality of Santo Tirso between the Provisional Regulations and the review of the Municipal Plan”, which is being supported by FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia - under the QREN-POPH program and the PhD Grant SFRH/BD/86675/2012, and developed in CEAU - Centro de Estudos de Arquitectura e Urbanismo - at the School of Architecture of Porto University - FAUP.

B. Moreira | Architecture and Urbanism Study Center | CEAU - FAUP | bmoreira@arq.up.pt

